

10-4456

7 JUN 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Undersecretary of State

SUBJECT : Attached Memorandum Entitled
"Possibility of an Earth Satellite
Being Launched from Communist
China"

As per your request, here are the views of the Board of National Estimates on the possibility of an earth satellite being launched from Communist China. I forward it to you with my concurrence. I am also sending copies to members of the Operations Coordinating Board for their information.

ALLEN W. DULLES
Director

SK:bpc

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0 & 1 - Addressee

2 - DCI file - *w/ cy att*

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Mr. Parrott handling distribution to OCB members.

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

6 June 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Possibility of an Earth Satellite Being Launched from
Communist China

SUMMARY

1. Communist China cannot itself launch an earth satellite in the near future. However, the USSR probably has the capability at present to place in orbit from Chinese Communist territory a Soviet earth satellite of up to about 500 pounds in size. As an ad hoc operation, this could be done at any time on short notice (about six months from initiation of the project), at relatively little cost, and probably without prior detection by US intelligence. With direct Soviet assistance in providing vehicles and equipment and in the training of Chinese personnel, the Chinese Communists could probably perform a successful earth satellite launching, under Soviet guidance and direction, in about one or two years from the initiation of the project.

This memorandum has been prepared with the assistance of representatives of O/SI, O/RR, and O/CI.

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2. Should the USSR and Communist China launch an earth satellite from Chinese territory, considerable propaganda advantage would accrue to them even though most informed world opinion would appreciate that the launching had been largely a Soviet show. We have no evidence concerning either such a Sino-Soviet policy decision, the construction of a launching site in Communist China, or the imminence of an attempted launching.

DISCUSSION

3. According to Peiping broadcasts, Kuo Mo-jo, head of the Chinese Communist Academy of Science, recently stated that Communist China's scientists were studying Soviet science and technology so that Communist China could launch its own earth Satellite "in the near future."*

* Peiping broadcast in English Morse to Northeast and Southeast Asia, 16 May 1958, and published in similar form by Pravda, 18 May. A slightly different version was broadcast by Peiping on 18 May, supposedly a recorded statement by Kuo (Mandarin to North America): "The Chinese scientists are determined to get China's artificial earth satellite into the sky at an early date. In order for this to materialize, we have to expend very great efforts. However, there will be a day when the artificial earth satellite of China will go into the sky. The earlier that day comes the better." It is not clear whether these two Chinese broadcasts, of the 16th and 18th, were intended to refer to the same, original statement by Kuo, or whether the second broadcast was meant to modify the first. A third, and most recent, Chinese broadcast (22 May, English Morse to Asia) simply states that a forum of Chinese Communist scientists at Nanking "approved the statement made by Kuo Mo-jo that China's scientists have the determination to go ahead with launching an artificial earth satellite at an early date." It will be recalled that Foreign Minister Chen Yi stated on 11 May that Communist China presently has "neither atomic bombs nor rockets . . . but we will have some in the future."

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Those broadcasts give no conclusive indications as to what the Chinese Communists consider "the near future," or what degree of Soviet assistance and involvement might be involved in such an undertaking.

4. Communist China presently has no capability itself to put an earth satellite into orbit, and probably could not itself develop such a capability within the next five-ten years.

5. However, with a great amount of Soviet assistance -- the supply of the earth satellite and its launching vehicle, the construction of launching facilities in China, the equipping and activation of instrumentation and data handling facilities, the training of Chinese technicians, and technical direction of the launching -- this time period could be markedly shortened. In these circumstances, a launching from a permanent installation of some kind in Communist China, with Chinese personnel predominating, would require from one to two years from the initiation of the project. Extremely fragmentary evidence indicates that the Chinese may have had some association with Soviet missile and space research programs in the past year or so, and may be making a considerable effort to begin the development of a missile and earth satellite program in China. It should be stressed, however, that we presently have no firm evidence indicating the construction of a permanent launching installation in China, although we would expect to get some fragmentary indication of such activity once begun.

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6. Should the primary Communist consideration be the psychological effect of launching an ostensibly Chinese earth satellite at the earliest practicable date, the USSR could launch a satellite from Communist Chinese territory at any time with relatively short preparation (about six months from the initiation of the project) and at relatively little cost. Currently available Soviet 350 or 700-mile range ballistic missiles, fitted with two additional stage rockets, could be transported without great difficulty to Manchuria or possibly to Sinkiang-Northwest China. There they could be fired from previously selected and prepared sites, without there necessarily being extensive down-range guidance and tracking. Such vehicles could orbit a satellite of up to about 500 pounds. An operation of this type could probably be accomplished without prior detection by US intelligence, especially if the launching occurred in Sinkiang or Northwest China. We presently have no evidence that such an attempt is planned or is imminent.

7. The USSR and Communist China would almost certainly consider that they could not palm off such an undertaking to all the world as being "Chinese," at any time in the near future. Rather, their intent would probably be to (a) dupe those whom they could; (b) highlight Chinese participation in the project and the developing potential of Chinese Communist science and weaponry; and (c) stress the generosity

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of the USSR's assistance to its friends. Such an undertaking would result in considerable psychological benefit to the USSR and Communist China.

8. While such a launching will remain a constant possibility, it is also possible that the emphasis of Sino-Soviet policy may be, instead, to develop a broader Chinese Communist program over the longer run which combines space research with an emerging missile capability. We presently have no evidence as to which, if either, of these courses has been, or will be, adopted.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

SHERMAN KENT
Assistant Director,
National Estimates

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